

# A State Divided: Missouri and the Civil War

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THE CHARGE OF THE FIRST IOWA REGIMENT, UNDER GENERAL LYON, AT THE BATTLE OF WILSON'S CREEK, NEAR SPRINGFIELD, MO., AUGUST 10th, 1861.

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## LIVING IN TROUBLED TIMES

Citizens of few states suffered as severely as those of Missouri during the Civil War. The conflict was fought in their streets and pastures, from the Iowa border to the Bootheel swamps and the Ozark hills. More than 400 battles, engagements, and skirmishes occurred within the state, including the decisive Battle of Westport in October 1864, the largest battle west of the Mississippi River. Most, however, were small affairs—bitterly contested raids and ambushes with no quarter asked or given. Only Virginia and Tennessee were more heavily fought over during the four grim years of war.

*"...all is destroyed even the rails & trees fencing of every kind bushes & shrubs nothing left that would hide a chicken. I never expect to witness another just such a sight—and when we reflect that it is upon American soil & by American Citizens it is melancholy to think upon..."*

—Isaac Hockaday, Lexington Farmer, 1861

Most Missourians probably would have preferred to remain neutral in the struggle, but they were not reluctant to participate once hostilities had begun. The majority were neither slaveholders nor abolitionists. They took up arms for generally abstract reasons that even they did not fully understand—state's rights, love of the Union, loyalty to the Constitution. While some fought for personal gain or for settling old grudges, many Missourians fought purely for self-preservation—forced to enlist or die at the hands of marauding Rebel bushwhackers or vengeful Union raiders.

*"I never fought the North because I hated the North. I did not desire to be one iota freer than I was under the flag of the union; but there was an abstract principle of States rights and four thousand millions dollars worth of African slaves that I thought could only be saved out of the Union."*

—M. Jeff Thompson, Confederate General

Missourians fought on both sides. At least 40,000 served in the Confederate army, plus an unknown number of behind-the-lines irregulars; some 109,000 were enlisted in the Union army. Ex-slaves and free blacks provided 8,344 men of the Missouri Union regiments, while thousands more enlisted in other states. Missouri sent more men to war, in proportion to her population, than any other state—60 percent of the eligible military population.

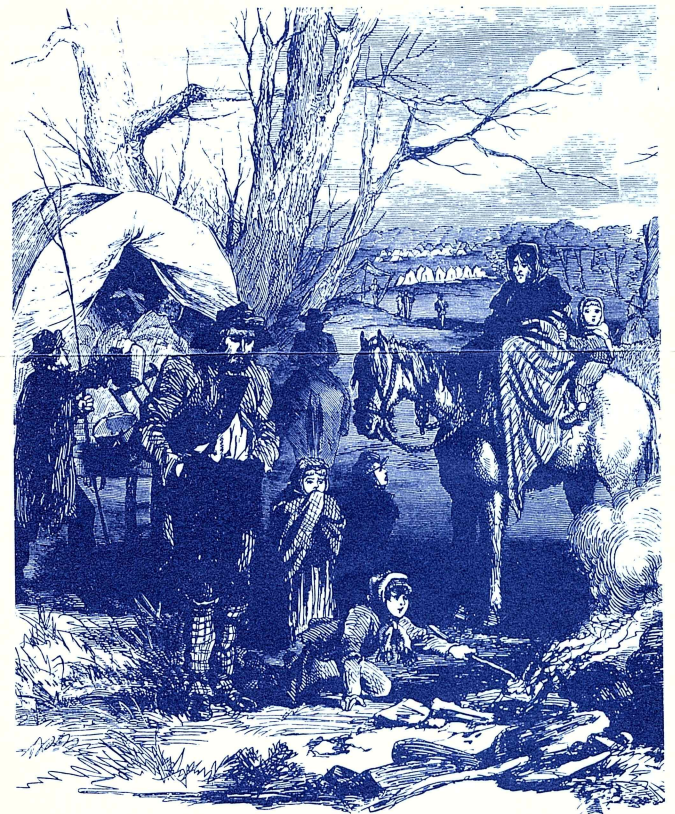
*"Come with your guns of any description that can be made to bring down a foe. If you have no arms, come without them...Bring blankets and heavy shoes and extra bed clothing if you have them...We must have 50,000 men."*

—Sterling Price, Confederate General, 1861

These Missourians knew the meaning of "civil war" better than the men of most states. At the Battle of Athens, Missouri, in August 1861, Union Colonel David Moore led a bayonet charge against a secessionist force that included his own two sons; at the sieges of Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1863, and Mobile, Alabama, in 1865, Federal Missouri boys faced old friends across the trenches in the Rebel ranks. On the home front, men joined either Union militia companies or Confederate guerrilla bands for protection against close neighbors of differing political convictions.

*"...there were some families in which some were for the Union and others for the Confederacy... One feared the other. That under such conditions all work and undertakings came to a stop can easily be understood."*

—John T. Buegel, Union Private, 1861



REFUGEES FROM SOUTHERN MISSOURI, DRIVEN FROM THEIR HOMESTEADS BY THE CONFEDERATES, ENCAMPED NEAR GENERAL SIGEL'S DIVISION AT ROLLA.

Even the families suffered. While the men served in uniform, their wives and children had to work the farms and gather the crops. Often the results of their labors were confiscated or destroyed by the marching armies or by bands of roving marauders. A knock on the door at night might mean a visit by bushwhackers or militia, come to search for weapons, conscript the men and boys, or steal and burn. In the cities, crowded by streams of homeless refugees, martial law and military occupation made life difficult while families waited for their loved ones in uniform to return.



*"...camped near the town of California, Missouri—utterly denuded and deserted by its inhabitants. Windows and doors, of the dwellings are either fast nailed, or smashed wholly out, and a more melancholy exhibition in its way I have not seen."*

—Albert Tracy, Union Captain, 1861

*"We were visited last night about two O'clock by the bushwhackers. I was up with the baby when they came... They got both of the guns and then went up stair, took some of my bed blankets...then searched the bureau drawers. They even took as small a thing as a comb and brush."*

—Mrs. Permelia A. Hardeman, 1862

Many Missouri soldiers never came home. They died of wounds, fever, dysentery, and what are now considered the diseases of childhood, such as measles and mumps. The war claimed 14,000 in Union blue between 1861 and 1865. Confederate dead were never accurately calculated,

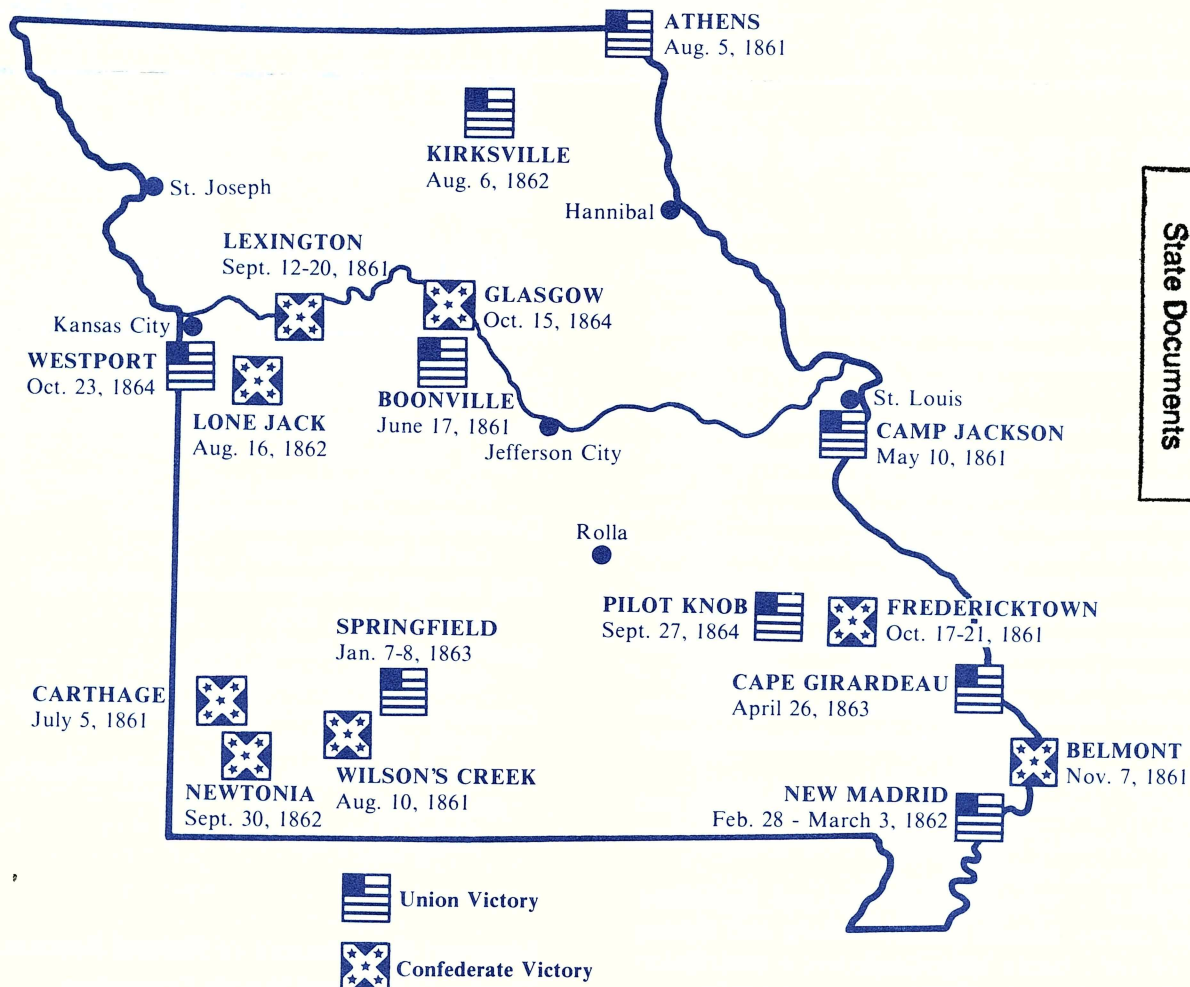
but of 5,000 men who formed the 1st and 2nd Missouri Confederate Brigades at the Battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas, in 1862, only 800 survived the war.

*"We have been in an awful battle and our company was cut to pieces...I saw Captain Gibbs fall and started to him when a bullet struck me...I am suffering much... I am afraid many of the boys are hurt. I am very tired and can't write anymore now. Goodbye."*

—Madison Creasey, Confederate Lieutenant, 1861

Missourians fell in actions both large and small: the epic battles of Vicksburg, Chickamauga, and Shiloh as well as the nearly forgotten skirmishes of Salem, Dry Woods, Osceola, and Cole Camp. Their graves are scattered across the United States from Virginia to the southernmost tip of Texas, and throughout the hills and valleys of their home state. Missourians shed a terrible river of blood in the war; the healing process, a slow one, continues to some extent even today.

## IMPORTANT BATTLES AND SKIRMISHES IN MISSOURI



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# WAR ON THE BORDER

With the start of the Civil War in 1861, Missouri increasingly found itself a divided state in a divided nation. Slavery was of less economic importance in Missouri than in other slave states, but Missouri's population was predominantly of southern stock and many sympathized with the cause of the Confederacy. However, there also was a large and growing number of German immigrants, primarily in St. Louis, who tended to be strongly anti-slavery and pro-Union. The strong emotions felt by important Missouri citizens who were tied to one side or the other quickly pulled the state apart.

Missouri itself was of vital importance to both the Union and the Confederacy. The state's substantial pool of manpower, its strategic geographic location on the great rivers and railways, its resources, and its wealth were sorely needed by both sides.

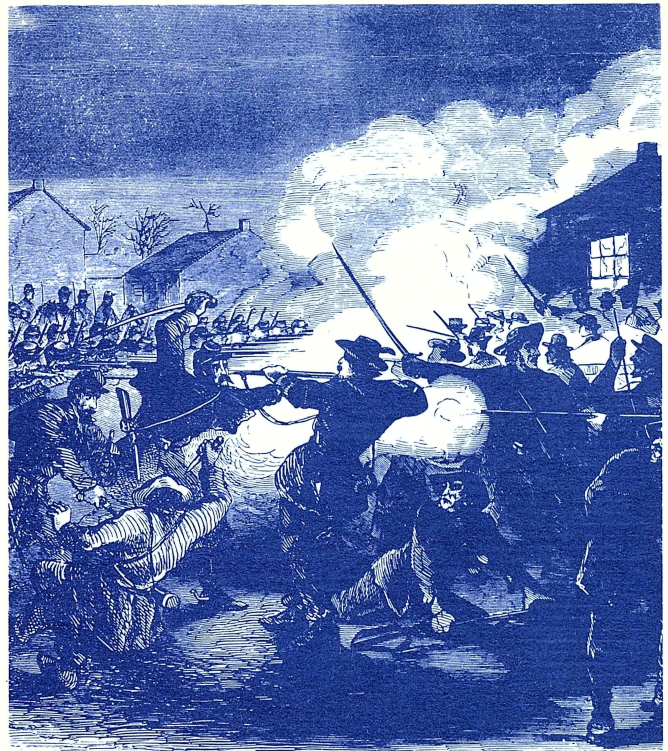
## Secession Crisis

The Civil War in Missouri took on three distinct phases. When the war began, leading citizens sympathetic to the Confederacy and those siding with the Union quickly organized militias in an effort to gain the upper hand for their sides. The first phase of the war in Missouri, characterized by numerous military engagements, began with an attack on a Union home guard regiment by a pro-Southern crowd in St. Louis in May 1861. Subsequently, federal troops occupied the state's capital at Jefferson City. They drove out the governor and the legislature, and installed a pro-Union provisional government. A series of small bitter battles followed at Boonville, Carthage, Wilson's Creek, and Lexington. Meanwhile remnants of the state's elected legislature met at Neosho and voted to secede. This act was recognized by the Confederate government and Missouri was admitted to the Confederacy (although there are doubts today about the legality of this act). Early in 1862, the pro-Confederate Missouri State Guard led by General Sterling Price, Missouri's former governor, was driven from the state and defeated by Union General Samuel Curtis at the Battle of Pea Ridge in northwest Arkansas.

## War in the Shadows

As the military war moved south for the next two years, Missouri, instead of finding itself at peace, became embroiled in a war more vengeful and vicious than before — a guerrilla war of revenge. This second phase of guerrilla war sprang in part from excesses in martial law and abuses by the military government during the occupation by Union forces.

The belief by the predominantly Northern forces policing Missouri that its citizens were disloyal secessionists led to harsh and often vindictive exercises of authority. This inflamed the resentments of many Missouri natives, some of whom were stirred to open rebellion. Guerrilla bands led by men such as William Quantrill and "Bloody Bill" Anderson spread blood and terror across central and western Missouri, and kept Union forces off balance and tied up for much of the Civil War.



NIGHT ATTACK ON THE FEDERAL FORCES UNDER MAJOR BOWEN, OCCUPYING SALEM, MO., BY THE CONFEDERATE FORCES UNDER COLONEL FREEMAN, DECEMBER 8TH, 1861.

## The Great Raid

The third and final phase of the war in Missouri began when Major General Sterling Price, hoping to recapture control of the state and to take the pressure off beleaguered Confederate forces elsewhere, crossed into Missouri from Arkansas in September 1864. His was to be a final and climactic sweep across the state.

With more than 12,000 mounted men, Price crossed the border and headed for St. Louis. His first major objective was a federal garrison at Pilot Knob. Three desperate Confederate charges against the earthen fort were met by withering fire from the 1,000 Union troops. The battle ended when the federal forces quietly slipped out at night and joined a stronger Union force in Rolla.

Delayed and weakened, Price abandoned hope of capturing St. Louis and marched to Jefferson City where he fought a one-day skirmish before deciding to leave the capital. With Union forces now in pursuit of Price's dwindling army, his troops fought battles at Boonville, Glasgow, and Lexington before reaching the decisive battlefield at Kansas City.

Approaching the city from the east, Price's army pushed a federal line of militia back, first from the Little Blue River and then from the Big Blue, to what was to become the last great battle of the war in Missouri. On Sunday, October 23, 1864, nearly 30,000 Union and Confederate troops clashed in the Battle of Westport.

After several bloody stands by Price's forces, the Union army under General Samuel Curtis, the victor of Pea Ridge, finally overwhelmed the southern troops and forced them into a disorganized retreat. Price was pushed south along the Kansas-Missouri border into Arkansas, ending the last major Confederate army action in Missouri.



# SEEING THE CIVIL WAR IN MISSOURI TODAY

**ATHENS** - Battle of Athens State Park. Preserved site of northernmost Missouri battle; historic buildings.

**HIGGINSVILLE** - Confederate Memorial State Historic Site. Site of Confederate veterans' home; historic chapel; cemetery.

**PILOT KNOB** - Fort Davidson State Historic Site. Well-preserved earthen fort attacked by Confederates in 1864.

**JEFFERSON CITY** - Missouri State Museum. Civil War exhibits; battle flags of Missouri regiments.

**KANSAS CITY** - Westport Battlefield Tour. Twenty-five numbered markers follow the course of the largest battle west of the Mississippi River; historic houses.

**KEYTESVILLE** - General Sterling Price Museum. Exhibits on Missouri's highest-ranking Confederate general.

**LEXINGTON** - Battle of Lexington State Historic Site. Site of 1861 siege; preserved Union trenches; historic Anderson House hospital.

**LONE JACK** - Jackson County Civil War Museum and Battlefield. Scene of 1862 Confederate victory; museum exhibits; historic cemetery.

**SPRINGFIELD** - Wilson's Creek National Battlefield. Visitors' center; historic house; walking and driving tours of 1861 battle site; Confederate and Union cemeteries and monuments.

**ST. LOUIS** - Missouri Historical Society (Jefferson Memorial). Exhibits of Civil War arms and uniforms; archives.

**ST. LOUIS** - Jefferson Barracks Historical Park. Major Union base for western campaigns; restored structures; exhibits.

## FOR FURTHER READING:

*Rebellion in Missouri: 1861. Nathaniel Lyon and His Army of the West.*

Hans Cristian Adamson, 1961.

*Grey Ghosts of the Confederacy: Guerrilla Warfare in the West, 1861-1865.*

Richard S. Brownlee, 1958.

*Quantrill and His Civil War Guerrillas.*

Carl W. Breihan, 1959.

*Civil War on the Western Border, 1854-1865.*

Jay Monaghan, 1955.

*Quantrill and the Border Wars.*

William E. Connelley, 1956.

*General Sterling Price and the Civil War in the West.*

Albert Castel, 1968.

*Turbulent Partnership: Missouri and the Union, 1861-1865.*

William E. Parish, 1963.

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